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SONNETS AND VERSES

BY ENID CLAY



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SONNETS
AND VERSES
BY EMIL CLAY



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I record my acknowledgments to the
Editors of *The English Review* and
Observer for permission to reproduce
certain of these Poems which have
appeared in their pages. E.C.

TO EDYTH OLIVE APPLIN.

SONG.

IF Love could capture Youth
(A willing prisoner he)
Bind him with golden bands,
And chain him where he stands,
Then would I fetter thee
With links of living steel
Forged in Love's armoury.

Youth is so fleet of foot
Love dies in his pursuit.

EROS
(IN PICCADILLY).

HERE where Love's victims bleed, and die
A fresh each day, the God of Love shall stand;
Mute sentinel, poised as for instant flight,
The arrow sped—the drawn bow in his hand.

Above the close-shawled women he holds sway;
Coarse, raucous voiced, they mock the tender bloom
Of innocent buds that scarce have come to birth;
Victims of sacrifice, sent to their doom.

And Eros shall be shamed that here he stands
Seeing glad youth, unheeding, pass him by.
Young life that like the bursting rose expands
Till all its pretty petals fading lie.

But through the day he still must watch apart,
Grey dawn, and golden noon, shall hold him fair
He may not leave the traffic of the flowers,
And night creeps down and finds him lonely there.

Night, like a deathless lover, holds him fast
Till pale ghost glimmerings of the morn
Shall touch his dis-illusioned eyes,
And Eros be new born.



SUSSEX DOWNS.

ON the grass of the Downs,
(Dear heart, you and I),
With the haze of the towns
Far away as we lie
So close here together,
With the sun at his best
Dear heart—you and I
Are at peace with the rest.
Our little world's here—
So close here together.

THE SALES.

I WATCHED the rabble of women.
The sales were on: with little eager eyes
They peered; and pushed the milder ones aside
With practised elbow and determined air,
And bargains drove that could not be denied.
So hard they worked in their absorbed endeavour:
They must be smart—or else be damned forever!

And as I gained once more
The light of blessèd day, and felt the breath
Of spring upon my cheeks, and the cool wind:
All wailing down the golden street of wealth
Came drums and pipes, and they who walk behind
Marshallled by men of purpose—unalloyed:
(The sales are on) God help the unemployed!

THE CASINO.

MORNING: a blaze of sunlight; the soft
spring airs
Flirt and flutter around;
The pigeons strut, see the swell of their breasts;
Dainty women feed them with little cakes;
The birds are young: they are taken unawares.

Noon: how hot and sultry, scarcely a breath;
Soon the sport will begin;
The pigeons, in cages ranged on the terrace below
Are trapped in their tiny prisons:
(Oh pitiful ones, wild-eyed, waiting for death).

Night: and the gaming tables are crowded again;
Breathless and animated,
Men & women are caught in the meshes of chance;
Now Rouge, now Noir is the winner:
(The pigeons are here to be plucked, as the birds
that are slain).



BUTTERCUPS.

ON either side the roadway
The fields lie gold and green;
Where buttercups are standing
All bravely to be seen.

Knee-deep among the buttercups
A little child can go;
And find a golden heaven
That only he may know.

God, when He made the country,
Could do no better thing
Than set a field of buttercups,
Ablaze, to meet the spring.

THE DEAD DOG.

A LEGEND.

ONCE on an evening very fair and cool
Christ walked with His disciples in the way;
And as they passed beyond the city walls,
There in a ditch, despised, forgotten, lay
A dog. The dead eyes glazed,
Mutely protesting, stared upon the world;
The coat lay matted on its bony ribs;
Pollution stank. And the disciples curled
Their nostrils, murmured that such things should be
Repulsive to their senses, and like churls
Reviled it. Then drew Jesus near and said:
'His teeth are white as pearls.'

MIRAGE.

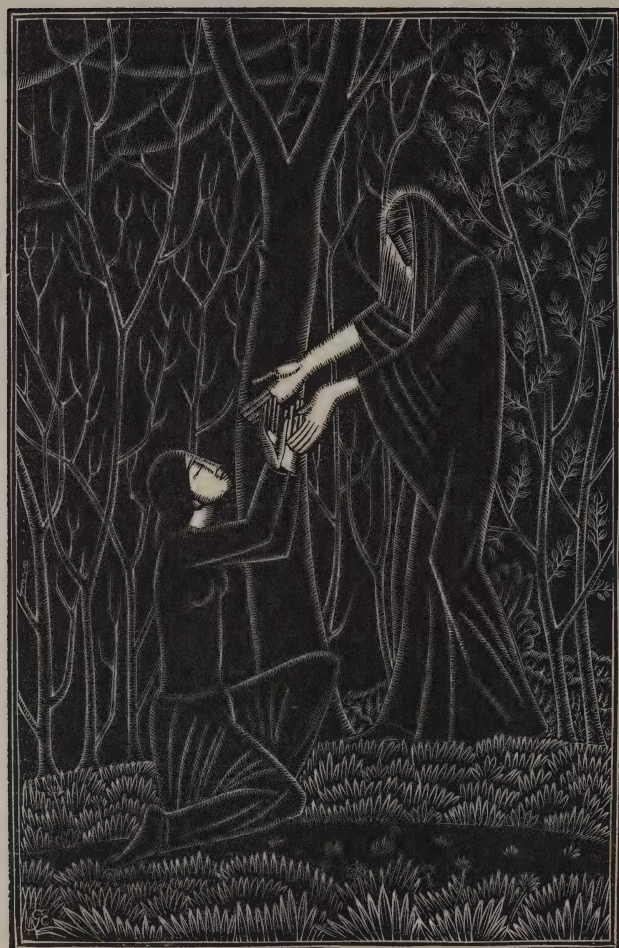
AS one who wanders in a desert place
Sees, after weariness in time of dearth,
As if reflected in a watered space—
The city's glow, the wonders of the earth:
I who have wandered in the pathless wild
Of hopeless love and longing unfulfilled,
May chance upon you, & your eyes that smiled,
Your touch that healed, your voice whose utter-
 ance thrilled,
Shall be to me refreshment, and a balm,
A mirage, an enchantment—oh my love,
Dare I disprove you? All my storms grow calm,
And all my desert is a singing grove.
Tho' now of all things am I dispossess't,
Yet in illusion I am ever blest.

THE CROSS.

THERE was a cross on Calvary;
And stark against the sky,
There hung the Christ of all the world:
Men saw, and passed it by.

There is a cross on the wide downs;
High on a hill it stands:
And men have carved and placed it there,
With love-inspired hands.

They left Him dead on Calvary,
But He is living still:
His cross against an English sky,
Christ, on a Sussex hill.



VICTORY.

NOW does the earth, rebellious of the mood
Of tyrant winter, that has held her long,
Feel in her fibres, not to be withstood,
The challenge: birds that flutter into song,
The sap that stirs in little lovely leaves,
The tremulous small things above the mould.
How shall we say that still her spirit grieves
For days long past and lovers spent and old?
I would go out upon a day of peace,
And if Death came to walk the woods of spring
Bid him good speed, and welcome my release,
This earth, this body, unremembering.
For Life has chained, that Death may set me free;
And in surrender lies my victory.

MAGDALEN, IN JUDGMENT.

HERE as I stand before you,
Answer me. What have you done?
Sleek and straight is the body
That never has borne a son;
Perfect in shape the blossom
That crowns the snow of your breast,
That never has suckled a baby,
Nor cradled a child to rest.

Your eyes are shut to the beauty
Of passion, and love, and truth;
Your ears are deaf to our pleading,
And closed to the cry of our youth.
Your name at the head of relief funds;
A seat in the family pew;
The respect of the next-door neighbour;
And your God has had more than His due.

The narrow soul that you boast of,
The pride of the loveless years,
Shall be weighed with our joy of living,
And count in the scale with our tears;
For glory has closed about me
And terror has held me dumb;
Travail has wracked my body
And out of the night I come.

I stand at the seat of judgment,
Answer me. What have you done?

THE DANCING GIRL.

LIFE caught you in a vagrant mood:
And mocked you, tip-toe as you stood:
Gave you delight to lure the sense,
And our desire for recompense.
Lips that are kissed their freshness keep:
And slow the tears unbidden creep,
As yours did, when their enterprise
Had failed you. Men are never wise:
And we, who passed you in the street,
Whose hearts are timed to slower beat,
How shall we hope for truth in you?
Or find it, being ourselves untrue?
. . . . But you are dead:
And all your little art is fled—
You shall have quiet now—and sleep,
Pale harlot, under skies that weep.

CONFESSION.

I'M not the least in love with you,
And yet, to me you seem
Alive, where others all are dead,
Or figures in a dream.

You're not the least in love with me,
I suit a passing mood;
Play echo to your fantasy,
A cadence understood.

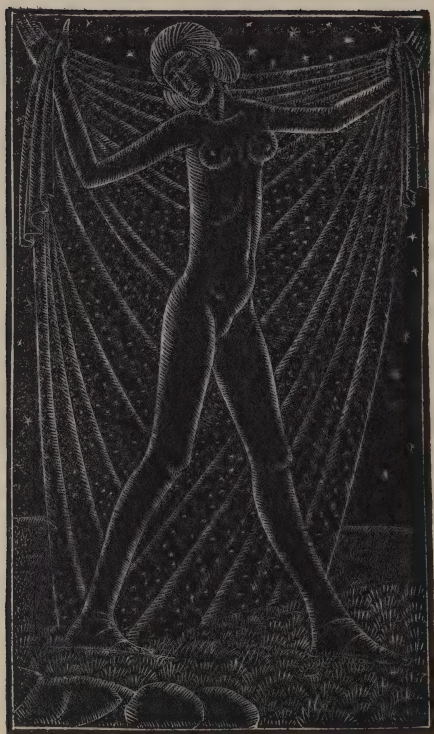
That's clear, in truth, so while we two
This foolish planet rove,
I hold you hostage to my hope,
And not the least in love.

JEU D'AMOUR.

MARCH winds were blowing when we met,
And so the game was started:
You blew a breath of love to me,
That left me broken-hearted.

June roses scented all the air,
(The game seemed so worth winning):
Their glory mingled with your kiss,
And never thought it sinning.

And still for some the March winds blow,
And roses perish never:
For all may play, and some must lose,
For ever and for ever.



DARTMOOR.

BEAUTY has fled the dusty town,
And shod with sandals of delight,
Here at the gateway of the moor
She dons her garment bright.

Purple and gold and emerald,
Her mantle spreads across the sky;
And breathless on the silent tor
She hovers in expectancy.

Swift down the curving pony track,
To where the shining waters meet,
She passes where the heather glows,
Nor stays her flying feet.

And when the moon on Dartmoor gleams,
And winds are soft, and clouds are light,
She, unabashed, her rest will take—
Beauty lies naked to the night.



A SONG OF THE DOWNS.

WHERE the dusty ribbon of road
Winds over the hill,
It leads at last to the cool,
The hidden springs,
See! you shall climb and climb,
And your heart shall shout
For joy, and the love of life,
And unuttered things!

Here is no place for tears
Nor any regret;
Bees in the bramble
Cluster insatiate;
The delicate blue veined harebell
Quivers in ecstasy
And the wind, as a lover, enfolds her
With heart elate.

Gorse that rivals the gold
Of the lusty sun,
Flaunts a splendour undimmed
In a world that sings.
Now to the God of the Downs
Give thanks each one:
For joy, and the love of life,
And unuttered things!

SONG.

THE planet swings in space:
Immeasurably far;
And distant is your face
As that bright star.

The bird, whose liquid note
Distils in happy song,
Has learned his tune by rote,
Your charms among.

And flowers their secrets keep,
For you alone they are;
Your mystery lies deep:
A bird, a flower, a star.

MAGIC.

WHEN laughing colour leaps and dies,
Flaming from out the winter fire,
It falls upon your face, and shows
In the deep pools that are your eyes,
A magical desire.

Like fairy pools
That mortal men may never know;
For they, poor fools,
Can never go
Beyond the limit of their schools,
That say the fairies all are dead,
That all their magic revels cease;
By the blue river of content,
And the green hills of peace,
They long ago have fled.

But we have tracked their hiding-place,
In light that shines, in warmth that glows;
Your eyes reflect the magic spells,
Enchanted droops your elfin face,
A yet unfolded rose.

THE FRIEND.

YOU, that to me in time long past have been
All things of dear and perilous delight,
The commonplace of empty years between
Has now removed, and exiled from my sight.
And passion with its wings of flame and fire
That beat against the ramparts of the brain,
Now wearied, sickens of its heart's desire:
Dull custom blunts the bitter edge of pain.
Yet, since we walk the world in separate ways,
And middle-age can trip the heels of youth,
We see in clear perspective those fair days
When Love & Life went hand in hand with Truth.
And I, who would be faithful to the end,
Can hide my wounds, and smile, and call you friend.

THE WELL-BELOVED.

WHOM the gods love die young:
So, down the ages sung,
We shall grow old and die,
And lay our beauty by;
And all our potent charms
Lie wasted . . . Vague alarms.
See now, the gods decree
Eternal youth shall be,
And old age keep the thrill
Of its quick heart-beats still;
The mind alert, the soul
Impatient, to its goal
Thrusts forward—so of me,
Dear gods, in charity,
Of me let it be sung;
Who being old, died young.

TO ELIZABETH.

GOD set a crimson rose upon your mouth,
And placed a singing bird within your throat;
But your soft petals have a little drooped—
The bird has hushed her note.

Dear heart, for you the crimson rose once more
Shall blossom, and the bird's note call again;
For love shall crown them both, & touch your lips;
That only your glad singing may remain.



MY MOTHER.

MY Mother lives in London,
And I am by the sea,
And oh! there are a lot of miles
To keep her love from me!

I go to school each morning
To sew, and read, and play—
I have no time at all, you see,
To think of her by day.

But often in the night-time
When I have said my prayers,
I seem to hear her footsteps
Come softly up the stairs.

She comes into my bedroom
And lies down on my bed,
She puts her arms about me—
And not a word is said.

I feel her soft warm kisses
And little tears run down—
For I live by the sea-side,
And she's in London Town.

THE SECRET ROOM.

IN the old house
There was a secret room
Behind a wainscot in the panelled gloom;
You could not see it:
Only if you pressed,
A spring released the secret all unguessed.

So in my heart
Is hid a secret room—
Fragrant with memories, and dedicate;
I hold it safe,
None other enters there—
Clean for your sake, untenanted, and bare.

The old house keeps
Its secret. There shall come
One day, as to a long-forsaken home,
He who seeks rest,
And with unfaltering feet
Enters, and finds his sanctuary sweet.

OF A FAIR LADY.

WHEN this our summer of desire is spent,
Turned to the tedium of a winter day,
Will you remember? Think, this way she went:
And thus she spoke, and so she used to say?
Gay as a painted queen of masquerade,
And wanton as the youngest page at Court;
A shadow now more still than any shade,
Who once was made for your eternal sport.
The swift embraces of the casual summer
Were not more light than hers, and now she goes
Before her autumn, weary—a new-comer
To some fair land of silence folded close.
Thus will you think, and calm and very wise,
Say only this: 'It is a smile that dies.'

THE SONG (To E.O.A.)

IN your quiet room, dark-panelled, and glowing
With the fire-light cheerful on the brick hearth,
You sat to-night . . and sang:
And other women sat with you;
Smiling . . . but all the while
Dominated, held by the grace of you.

Out in the dark street I passed along;
Commonplaces surged about me;
People jostled, hurrying, crowding
The villainous writhing worm of the underground;
Oh, the squat, the ugly faces,
Lewd and leering and sinuous:
(Yes, all these, but I did not see them)
Voices, grating and shrill:
(But I did not hear them):

Only for me your eyes, unfathomable,
Set like jewels in your face;
Only your voice, Beloved, through the years,
Unaltered and vibrant,
Singing, singing in the quiet room.

STILL LIFE.

HERE is the secret beauty of the world
Made visible, and in a transient hour
Arrests the vision: frail as a wind-flower
That in a storm-swept forest lies uncurled,
Flowers in a vase of blue—from you shall spring
Enchantment, and fulfilling of desire:
And never shall your delicate graces tire.
As love outlasts the rose's blossoming,
You will survive our frailty. Dimness takes
Our eyes, and all our trivial words become
An emptiness, and we stand mutely dumb
With longing: we are silent for your sakes.
Your mist-blue flowers enduring fragrance give:
Immortal—on a painted canvas live.

KNOWLEDGE.

HOW may I know when Love to me is come?
Whose speech is faltering. As a lamed bird
Caught in the snare of Fate, I, being dumb
Even as he, can give my thought no word.
My Love that has been prisoner so long,
Is fettered: a poor bird on broken wing
That strives to gain into his heaven, strong
In his own faith: Ah, teach my bird to sing;
So may I know that Love draws near to me,
Tho' yet as one who dreaming, lies asleep
Fearing to be awakened, lest he see
In answering eyes the look of those who weep.
I, through my tears, if that your love be mine—
Reflect your own, and need no other sign.

MEETING.

HERE in the park we two
Watch as the people pass,
How the sun, sinking, throws
Shadows athwart the grass.

And our words wander on,
Light, as a drift of leaves;
But the unshed tears are bright
As raindrops on the eaves.

For the thoughts that fill the heart
How shall the heart disclose?
And only the nightingale
May understand the rose.

Oh, good to meet, my dear—
And better still to part:
When the sun sets there lies
A shadow on the heart.



THE PICTURE GALLERY.

THE world outside in wintry mood
A thing of sullen beauty stood;
Within, upon a gallery wall
The flowers held high festival.
The gay exultant marigold
Challenged the joy of tulips bold;
Asters aflame with vivid hue,
Cornflowers and larkspur deeply blue;
Daisies, that do at Michaelmas
Bend down towards the eager grass,
Anemones, demure and frail
Like virgins at a carnival—
All the sweet promise of a year
Is come to birth, and gathered here
Within the compass of a wall,
The flowers hold high festival.

AFTERMATH.

SO, after age-long years, we come
To this quiet café, dimly-lit:
And memories, crowding back the years,
Surge forward, clamouring—what of it?

So long since first beneath your kiss
I felt my body's pulses beat,
Since first we drained the golden cup
Of life, and found it bitter-sweet.

For you were high romance to me;
And all the glories that there were.
And here we sit—'The wine list, please'—
'Beaujolais? half a bottle, sir?'

And all the sins that held us thrall,
And all the love that made them sweet,
Have now resolved themselves to this:
'What do we drink, to-night, and eat?'

So, I am glad you may not know
All that I think: I do not stir—
The mockery of your half-closed eyes,
Your cynic mouth, can still deter.

Once you were high romance to me;
And all the glories that there were.

MEMORY.

I SAID, Now will I make an end of these
That have outlived their use; they served me long:
With ancient rite and secret mysteries
They now must go—while yet my will is strong.
Came HOPE, a little faded ere her prime,
And FRIENDSHIP, that to fickle DOUBT had strayed:
AMBITION, lisping in a faltered rhyme—
A little wilful SIN—would fain have stayed
Without; I was so sad to let them go,
I laid them in a gentle grave and deep:—
And there they lie, as a tired child may do,
And Mother Earth has tucked them in to sleep.
But one escaped—to hold my heart in fee:
Dear ghost of dreams whose name is MEMORY.

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